

NARRATOR: Stevens, Gordon
INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves
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LOCATION: Boise, Idaho
PROJECT: Smokejumpers/Forest Fire Fighters

Tape Counter	Page Number	Summary
000		Introduction.
005		Stevens gave information about his life prior to joining the forest service. He played minor league baseball, served in the military in the Korean War, and attended school at Weber State College and Utah State University.
030		At Utah State he took forestry classes and earned a bachelor's degree in forestry and a master's degree in forestry economics. His classes at Utah State greatly applied to his work in forestry. Classes taught by Ted Daniel were difficult; he still remembers those classes.
080		His first job was as a forester in Escalante, Utah. Stevens discussed what a forester did in the Dixie Forest in central Utah. Stevens also ran the fire program at Escalante. He mentioned that he had training and work experience in various sub-fields in forestry.
110		Stevens' summer work involved fighting fire either at the Boise National Forest or the Cache National Forest. He worked in fire management during those summers; that prepared him for running the fire program. Stevens talked about how the forest service met with the university to find jobs that catered to the students' interests.
145		His summer work, his marriage, and his juggling work and graduate school were topics in this part of the interview.
175		Stevens told stories about his summer chasing smoke in the Boise National Forest. He briefly detailed how he and others fought fires in 1955 in this forest.
230		Stevens moved to Cedar City, Utah, after a year at Escalante. He discussed what he did during the summer while at Cedar City. Part of his job was working with timber sales, as well as fighting fires. He also talked about what he did during the non-fire seasons. At Cedar City he

assisted the district forester, which meant he worked at a lot of different aspects of forestry, including timber sales and aerial surveillance for fires.

360 According to Stevens all of these differing tasks in forestry really aided his career in the forest service.

375 He moved to Warren, Idaho to become a district forester. He and his family lived in Warren in the summer and McCall in the winter. The Warren District was small in terms of staff, so Stevens did a lot of the work himself. In 1966 the whole district seemingly caught fire; Stevens discussed how he managed the various fire that burned during that year.

450 When his children were of school age, he asked and received a transfer to Garden Valley. This district was well staffed, so he had people working in all aspects of the district. After eighteen months he was transferred to Boise.

480 In 1966 there was not a national or regional overview of fires, so Stevens talked about how they fought fires and used fire crews in the middle 1960s.

500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 Stevens told a story about one specific fire in one district he worked. The fire lasted all through the summer until the first snow fell.

015 In the 1960s each fire had an overhead crew, which helped in fighting fire. During this time they were not a strong organization, but the work, including fire fighting, was done.

035 Starting in Garden Valley, Stevens became more of an administrator, because he had staff underneath him to do all the things he did at other forests. While at Warren, he wintered in McCall and did a lot of paperwork and planning. He kept busy because he was the only full-time employee in the Warren District.

060 His title in Boise was Fire and Aviation Branch Manager. He talked about the various buildings he worked at in Boise, including the Belcher Building, the Boise

Interagency Fire Center, and a building on Park Boulevard. At the fire center he had forest, regional, and national responsibility at one time. That eventually changed as those items moved under different supervision.

- 100 Stevens discussed his job at Boise. He supervised Fire, Aviation, and Electronics. He learned a lot about Aviation and Electronics management. His fire background helped his work in Boise. Stevens also furnished details about a “typical day” during fire season while working in Boise.
- 160 Once the fire center opened, the concept of fighting fires changed. Crews were formed, and those crews stayed together throughout the fire season. This increased the closeness of the overhead crews. The teams almost became a brotherhood. Stevens actually worked on one of those teams as a fire boss. He fought fires all over the country. This caused some strain between working on his crew and his full-time job at the Forest Service. He actually served on three teams at one time, until his supervisor told him to quit two of the teams.
- 210 Stevens talked about the process involving how his specific fire team would be called and go to a fire somewhere in the United States. If local crews failed to control a blaze, then a regional team, such as Stevens’, would travel and fight that fire until it was contained. So, a “typical” day might find Stevens not even in Idaho. On one fire he fought in one of the Great Lakes States, he was eventually called back to Boise to do his regular job.
- 270 He recalled two years, 1977 and 1979, as two big fires years. In 1979 he spent almost the whole summer in the Salmon and Challis National Forest fighting fires in the “Primitive Area.”
- 300 Stevens talked about how fire bosses met in the spring to discuss how to rebuild or change or keep the team composition for the overhead fire crews in the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service. After he retired from the service, he opened his own business as a fire consultant. So, he has continued to fight fire, off and on, from his retirement in the early 1980s to the middle 1990s. In 1994 he spent a summer fighting fires in an area that included the Warren District. He stayed on that fire

until November. If the Forest Service called him today, he would come back and help.

400 Stevens offered his opinions about the “10 a.m. policy,” which was the mantra of the Forest Service from 1935 to the 1970s. Stevens not only talked about this policy but an overview of the history of the Forest Service, particularly the use of manpower. Stevens said this policy was hard to comply with.

485 By the 1970s people began to realize that each fire could be handled in ways other than attacking it to control it by 10 a.m. the next day.

500 **END OF SIDE TWO**
TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

000 Introduction.

005 Stevens talked about how the Forest Service officials transformed the fire policy in the 1970s. He mentioned an escape fire analysis, which was a way to analyze how fires should be fought. This analysis could help the Forest Service save money by realizing that some fires could not reasonable be fought using the 10 a.m. policy.

035 Stevens showed how the new ideas worked on one particular fire in the Salmon National Forest. These new ways saved considerable money on this fire. He also talked about using a suppression strategy on each fire. Every fire needs a strategy, according to Stevens, which may or may not include putting people on the fire.

075 The public latched onto the term “let it burn” to describe this new policy. The Forest Service tried to explain that it was an observation policy.

090 Stevens talked about how the 1980s brought a spirit of interagency to fight the forest fires. This interagency approach has moved from the national level to the regional, state, and local level. The majority of fire teams have members from different national agencies.

115 By the time he retired, Stevens enjoyed teaching the young fire fighters more than supervising and administrating.

- 125 He still would enjoy fighting fires, and he said he would never completely retire. But he now enjoys other aspects of life.
- 140 Stevens talked about current fire ecologists. He get frustrated because he thinks these people have caused a generational conflict by claiming that previous policy harmed the forests more than it helped. He thinks that current people do not appreciate the history; they just use it to blame.
- 175 Stevens gave his opinions on prescribed burning. He concluded by saying he still enjoys watching the fire fighting activity during the summer, including the smokejumpers and airplanes.
- 195 **END OF SIDE ONE**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Anderson Ranch Reservoir
Belcher Building (Boise, Idaho)
Boise Interagency Fire Center
Boise National Forest
Boise Pilots (minor league baseball team)
Boise, Idaho
Cache National Forest
Cedar City, Utah
Challis National Forest
Daniel, Ted
Dixie National Forest
Escalante, Utah
Garden Valley, Idaho
Goat Creek (Salmon National Forest)
Great Lakes
Johnson Flying Service (McCall, Idaho)
McCall, Idaho
Odgen, Utah
Payette National Forest
Preston, Idaho
Redding, California
Salmon National Forest
Ship Island Lake (Salmon National Forest)
Stockton, California
Utah State University
Warren, Idaho
Weber State College